

Sister to Sister *—Our Voices Shout Across The Oceans*

An Introspective Appeal for Freedom

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Sisters stand together for common rights all the time. We speak as one voice when it comes to justice, equal pay, demands for opportunity and good education. We work together, like a village, to look out for the betterment of our children. We take care of the household. We are managing businesses, building multi-billion dollar corporations and crossing the atmosphere in aeronautics. We're doing the doggone thing!

Our collective, and individual, ability to move the world in intentional, courageous and transformative ways is undeniable. With that knowledge we ask, where are we on the issue of freedom for our sisters in the far off lands of West Africa? Do we

The most recent slavery survivors who gave testimony during the Press Conference sponsored by our ally, IRA- Mauritania while we were in Senegal.



Che "Rhymefest" Smith with local Mauritanian artists who have been forced into exile in Senegal. Taken during the press conference hosted by IRA-Mauritania.

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even know about a country named Mauritania, one of the three largest countries on the continent of Africa? Do we know about this 99.9% Muslim country where chattel slavery, sex-trafficking and the vestiges of slavery run rampant? Where are the voices for our sisters on this issue?

Surrounded by Mali, Gambia, Ghana, Senegal and other western nations on the upper western region in the Sahara Desert of Africa, lies Mauritania. According to the World Index, it is the number one perpetrator of enslavement of its own people across the world! Nearly 20% of its population represents enslaved persons. That's just the number of persons that can be counted. Many have no documentation to identify themselves, so they aren't even included (a situation we are quite familiar with... remember the

Women's Suffrage Movement of the 1840's). Among the four main tribal groups of native black Africans in the country, the slaves (or those who are former slaves) are the indigenous black Moors or Haratin. The others: Fulani, Soninké and Bombara are oppressed in other ways, all of which trickle down from slavery. Similar to the roots of American racism, although the majority population may be of Black African descent, the power of the elite resides in the hands of the minority, the invading Arab Berbers (tribally recognized as the beydanes – literally "white man"), or the white Moors (again, this black/white divide is nothing new to us, either.)

Sisters, we address this statement to you, specifically, because the most valued slaves in Mauritania are women. Women represent value because they are the mothers of the Motherland, the host of reproduction. More slaves,

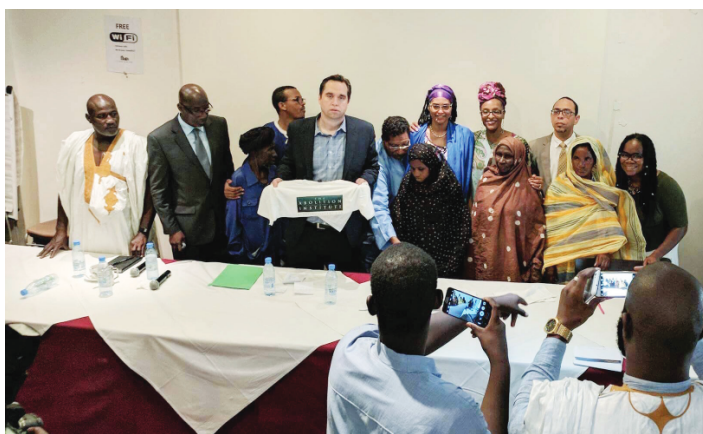
more wealth. It's easy math. But, what does that really mean? Children are given away as gifts. This breaks down the fabric of any family life. Young girls are assaulted, abused, impregnated at the tender young ages of 12-15. Often they are forced to have the children of not only their masters, but also their master's sons, brothers, friends, or whomever else is given the privilege to come upon them.

Let's be clear, the timeline in Mauritania reads like this: slavery was banned in 1981, officially outlawed in 2007, but not actually criminalized with penalty until 2015, where it still took another year (May 2016) before a meaningful conviction with restitution was upheld! Today, the enforcement of the law remains absent because the white beneficiaries occupy the judicial and political positions that are assigned to oversee justice. The abolitionists' fight for freedom and justice has been a



protracted one... disparagingly, one with many casualties. They face extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, property theft, and the destruction of their legal documents. The Mauritanian government unequivocally denies that these human rights violations continue to occur.

For example, part of the government's strategy to maintain the status quo is to deny access to international observers. As participants of a recent U.S. delegation (including theologians, scholars, social justice and human rights activists and artists), we were amongst the many who have been denied permission to step foot on the ground in Mauritania. Determined to continue our mission to study, learn and understand the facts behind this centuries old legacy of slavery in Mauritania, with the hope that we might find cause to support and highlight the achievements the current leadership of this country were making to change that narrative; we pressed forward.



We landed in nearby Senegal where we continued our mission. Note, Senegal has served as a refugee hosting post for many exiled Mauritians, since a border dispute in 1989, which put the two countries at the brink of war. In 1993, the UN estimated that the total number of Mauritanian refugees living in Senegal was around 52,500. This number has dramatically increased over these past few decades. We selected to complete our tour here, in Senegal, fully aware of this historical backdrop.



We heard shockingly contrasting perspectives about the existence of slavery from Muslim faith leaders one of whom adamantly cried out for advice on how to press forward when even his own brothers of the faith refuse to face the truth! We met with governmental organizations attempting to address the issue, but doing so at tragically nominal efforts. And, ultimately, we met with former slaves, human rights advocates, abolitionists and civilian Mauritians, many of whom have been forced into exile.

It was here, when we heard the riveting testimonies of our beautiful, strong sisters, that we understood the depth of our purpose. Now, we bear witness to their stories. These women, although forced into a horrific state of survival, have done just that! They survived. They have a story to tell, and now, we do too. They don't have access to the means needed to tell their stories in the Western world. So, here is where we come in! We are their voice.



We demand of ourselves that their struggle become our struggle. We commit ourselves to the call of sisterhood that shares the tears, the heartbreak, the struggles and the overarching yearning to be free! By reading this, we ask that you match our commitment – Tell Their Stories! Give voice to these voiceless women in a powerful coalition of international sisterhood.



The women of the delegation with Mauritanian activists

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Human rights are a birth right! Justice for Black lives (men and women) are not ideas narrowly defined by your birthplace. Once and for all, we must demand that all of our sisters (and brothers) are free from such inhumane circumstances.

In this 21st Century, it is incredibly unimaginable to believe that any sister, anywhere in the world would be bound to a life of

servitude; convinced by her generational conditioning that the only lot in life for her is that of a servant under the foot of her master. We must change that lie! We must tell the truth. We must use our voices to free our sisters and shake up the very foundation of the land upon which we call our soil until it rumbles for freedom all the way across the Atlantic Ocean and into the far northwestern corner of Africa.

Please lift your voice in commitment by signing the petition at change.org For more information, please visit The Abolition Institute web page: www.StoppingSlavery.org.

Until every sister is a free woman, none of us shall be free!



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